
Branches

Alexandria First Presbyterian Church

“I am the vine, you are the branches.”

July | August 2020

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“I am
the Vine,
you are the
branches.”

John 15:5

A Note from Nick

Dear Friends,

As I write you today it is hot . . . currently it is in the 90s outside. Which for me, is a reminder that it is actually July. It is a reminder, that yes, it is actually summer. Normally, I would know it is summer because the kids would not be going to school. But the kids haven't been going to school since March. Normally, I would know it's summer because we would be gearing up for Vacation Bible School. But this year our VBS program has been cancelled. Normally, I would be seeing each of you on Sunday in worship and hearing about all of your summer trips and adventures. But we aren't able to meet in person for worship, and most of us have very few summer plans, if any at all. No, these are not normal times. Restrictions are starting to loosen and we are experiencing some return to normalcy, but as we watch the Covid-19 numbers spike in other states and as we hear about second waves, I'm forced to wonder how things will look next week, next month, next summer?



So what does all this mean for the church? Well, as you probably heard, our session has unanimously agreed not to rush back to in-person worship. Instead they are choosing to be cautious and intentional about *how* and *when* we can be together again. They are using this time to lay out plans and think about how we can worship safely while maintaining social distancing and best practices. When we have more information on the dates and details of resuming in-person worship we will communicate them to you. Like our summer, worship will look and feel different and so it will be important to be ready to adapt and adjust to the changes. We will have to wear masks, and we will have to spread out and sit separately to maintain social distancing . . . but you know what will be the same? God. Scripture tells us that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). For as much as our world may look and feel differently right now, God remains the same. God’s love and grace continues to be present and at work in us. Right now we may have different ways of worshiping and being the church together, but God continues to be faithful.

I pray that remembering together God’s love is unchanging and constant in these different and challenging times will be a comfort to you. And that you will find hope in God’s unwavering presence in our lives . . . now and always! Because things may not be normal this summer, but God is the same . . . yesterday, today and forever!

Your friend in Christ,

Pastor Nick

Tending the Flock

How to Reach Rev. Nick Hatch

- Through the church office Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. 908-996-4333
- By the church's website on the "contact us" link: www.alexpres.org
- Via his email: nhatch@alexpres.org

Join Us in Worship

Join us for an online worship experience each Sunday at 10 a.m. by accessing our website or Facebook. This Sunday's service, and several of the most recent are also available 24/7.

Condolences

John Sebok, a faithful friend of the church, passed away July 11, 2020. John is the father to two of our members, Renee Skibinski and Shari Norgard. The family asks that you respect their privacy and to please withhold from calling on them now as they process their grief together (cards are fine of course).

Baptisms

Baptism is the visible sign of an invisible event: the reconciliation of people to God. We rejoice with those who are celebrating their baptism anniversary this month. It was in July that Mackenzie Elizabeth Doyle, Wyatt Goldman, Tammy Belle Hampton Sassaman, Alyssa Mary Schuetz, and Brandon Scott Schuetz were baptized. In August Danica Lee Doyle, Tyler Ian McGuire, and Matthew Anthony Folmar were baptized. Congratulations and blessings upon being a child of God!

New Address

Notes, cards, letters, and good thoughts sent to Scott Moran are deeply appreciated while his is deployed. He is scheduled to return February 2021:

Scott Moran (do not include any rank)
Fire Department
TFI 6-1-B
APO AE 09316



Lunch Bunch Is Back

On Wednesday, July 29 at noon, please join us in the courtyard for lunch. We will provide store bought iced tea, chips, and cookies, and invite you to bring a sandwich or salad for yourself. We will stay at least six feet apart. Bring a mask in case you need to enter the building to use the kitchen or rest room. Hope to see you there!



Christian Response to Racism

In the fall we began a conversation about racism and our Christian response. As recent heartbreaking events have indicated, that conversation is still very much needed. We continued the conversation on June 14 via a Zoom meeting guided by the article *Ten Myths White People Believe about Racism* by Carolyn Helsel. The article is still available for those who missed the discussion: <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/ten-myths-white-people-believe-about-racism?fbclid=IwAR0rT2pTJyd-92qjD5LRbqZISdk5rPXqo2hENJKINJePm5u-20QuDFNmu8E>

The 21 Day Race Equity Challenge is not an easy challenge, but a worthwhile one. To this end you can still take The Challenge by selecting articles, videos, and podcasts to review found at <https://myersparkpres.org/project/better-when-were-back-together/>. Each one will open our understanding of racism, helping us to see a new perspective. We will be presented with ways on how to go into the world with fresh eyes, notice the injustice we see, and work for change.

Update

The AFPC Session met on June 10th and decided to continue meeting online for worship for the remainder of the summer. During this time, the elders will be praying, planning, and working to make preparations for safely returning to in-person worship in the fall. This was not an easy decision and was made after extensive research, thoughtfulness, and prayer.

Please stay tuned for more information about how and when we will resume in-person worship and in the meantime, continue to join us online for worship each Sunday at 10 a.m. Remember, the sanctuary may be closed, but the church continues to be open to the Spirit's working and moving in our lives of faith at AFPC!

In Christ's peace,

The Rev. Nicholas Hatch

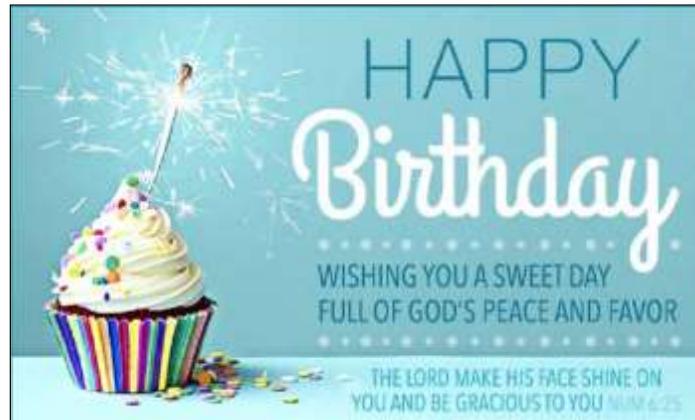


Remember Our Food Pantry Over the Summer

Kids are home and the economy is a challenge; both of which make the demands on our food pantry even greater over the summer months. If each of us is able to buy just one extra little jar of peanut butter or one extra box of pasta a week, imagine what a difference that would make! Please bring *any* non-perishable food or full-sized personal item to the box on the porch by the church offices. We value your on-going help and praise God for your generosity!

July Birthdays

2	Doug Bondor	12	Victoria Kramer	16	Ashley Kunich	24	Lyla Fritsche
3	Al Navarro	13	Don Bone		Matthew Pardonner		Charlotte Hatch
4	Ashley Folmar		Larry Cascio	17	Margo Abelman		Carol Van Norman
	Susan Kunich		Amanda Lessig	18	Jed Mock	25	John Solomon
5	Jackie Lubinski		Taylor McGuire	19	Lois Bondor	30	Maggie Purcell
8	Travis McGuire	14	Dave Schostkewitz	22	Kathy Krov	31	Shari Norgard
10	Heidi Hedden	15	Mackenzie Doyle	23	Mike Torrey		



August Birthdays

2	Melissa Kramer	7	Amelia Schaefer	17	Matthew Torrey	24	Josh Christ
	Abby Schaefer	8	Troy Tiedeman	18	Pati Tiedeman	25	Eleanor Fleck
4	Anthony Vastola	9	Gayle Hatch	19	Liz McMahan	27	Gary Knapp
7	Madison Butz		Ava Navarro		Marge Schade		Steve Pardonner
	George Erlandson		Robin Vogel	20	Cole Fritsche	28	Luke Abelman
	Angela Maglio	10	Joan Carroll	22	Stacy Butz		Glynn Skibinski
	Robin Pulsinelle	12	Linda Andreychak	23	Peter Christ	29	Craig Norgard



Caring Hands Crafters

Caring Hands Crafters are continuing to work on our handmade caps for patients at St. Luke's hospital and students participating in the *Hat Not Hate* anti-bullying program. For a simple way to make a cap without any crochet hooks or knitting needles, go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HciglsBc_0o. We encourage everyone to try to make a gift from the heart; and please keep creating and praying until we meet again!

We miss you all.

Alice Hansen and Pati Tiedeman



Christian Education News and Updates

Summer Sunday school, youth fellowships, and in-person Bible studies continue to be suspended at this time due to the current health crisis.

The CE team looks forward to providing all of these again in the future and will send an email out to our families when they all resume.

During this down time of social distancing though, please think and pray about how you may want to be involved in this team in years to come as a Sunday school teacher, helper, or a nursery care provider.

The CE team could always use more helpers and ideas!

Until we are able to meet again, the CE team leaders wish all of you safety and good health!



Presbyterian Church USA: What We Believe

Brief History

Presbyterians trace their history to the 16th century and the Protestant Reformation. Our heritage, and much of what we believe, began with the French lawyer John Calvin (1509-1564), whose writings crystallized much of the Reformed thinking that came before him.

Calvin did much of his writing from Geneva, Switzerland. From there, the Reformed movement spread to other parts of Europe and the British Isles.

Many of the early Presbyterians in America came from England, Scotland, and Ireland. The first American Presbytery was organized at Philadelphia in 1706. The first General Assembly was held in the same city in 1789. The first Assembly was convened by the Rev. John Witherspoon, the only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence.



John Calvin



***Be of good courage,
and he shall strengthen your heart,
all ye that hope in the Lord.***

Psalm 31:24



The Tackle Box Returns

If your child would like to take a turn with the Tackle Box this summer, please contact Pastor Nick or the church office. We will arrange for you to pick up the tackle box and place your item in it. Pastor Nick will need the tackle box returned by Thursday of each week. Let the fun begin!



Feel free to stop by the door to the offices and check out the

Book and Puzzle Exchange Box

You can donate a few books or puzzles, or take some

Please leave items that you are not expecting to be returned,
so we don't have to keep track of the donations



Worship DVDs

If you can't access the internet but would like to enjoy our Sunday worship services, pick up a DVD from the box outside the office door. Online worship services are available for viewing on your DVD player.

Please call ahead so we can be sure a copy is available for you.



The Adventures of Flat Jesus

“And remember, I am with you always.” - Matthew 28:20

Summer is about to begin, and even though we may be stuck at home, we need to remember that Jesus is with us. So take Flat Jesus with you . . . even if it’s just to the back yard, or the park, or on a walk in your neighborhood. Wherever you go this summer, near or far, take Jesus with you!

Email your pictures to Pastor Nick (nhatch@alexpres.org) or post them to the church’s Facebook page.

Together let’s remember that we are connected to each other and to Jesus this summer!



Think About It

This is a flyer posted in a church in France:

- It is possible that on entering this church, you may hear the Call of God.
- On the other hand, it is not likely that he will contact you by phone.
- Thank you for turning off your phone.
- If you would like to *talk* to God, come in, choose a quiet place, and talk to him.
- If you would like to *see* him, send him a text while driving.



Reminder!

Although the facility is closed, our expenses continue. Just like your home, we have electric, oil, propane, and insurance bills to pay as well as salaries. Please remember to send in your tithes and offerings by mailing a check or donating online. Thank you.

Ecumenical Gathering

An ecumenical faith gathering will be held every Saturday, from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Milford Presbyterian Church until further notice. We meet to support social justice.

Come and stand with other Christians to promote social justice and racial equality.



Invite a Friend to Church

Recently Pastor Nick challenged everyone to proclaim the Kingdom of Heaven. How do we do that now? How can we proclaim God's Kingdom in the midst of a global pandemic? How can we invite someone to church when the sanctuary is closed?

It may actually be easier now than ever to invite someone to church. Simply share our website or share the worship through the church's Facebook.

Can you think of someone to invite to church this Sunday? Can you think who you might invite? Let's do our best to share God's love and grace as we invite new friends to participate in our online worship.

Presbyterian Church USA News

Leaders notice a hunger for spirituality during the crisis

Melody K. Smith | Presbyterian News Service

While congregations and new worshipping communities are facing unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are also innovating by learning new technologies, starting new missions, and finding new ways to be the Church while social distancing. A report from PCUSA Research Services describes some of the challenges that worshipping communities are facing and provides a peek at the new things that are springing forth.

Dr. Angie Andriot, research analyst with Research Services of the PCUSA said, "Despite the fear and despair that is echoed by many church leaders in the face of this pandemic, the overwhelming response to this despair has been one of faith and hope. I have learned that an emphasis on gratitude, finding ways to laugh and physical exertion (working out, long walks or bike rides, etc.) are essential to keep my 'tank full.'"

Congregations are doing many things to respond to local virus-related needs with the most common being praying for health care workers and increasing food ministries. One church began a pen pal program connecting members with those isolated due to age, mobility or illness. The ideas go from paper to technology as there has been an awakening in congregations that use technology as a meaningful tool to include homebound members. The huge grin on the face of a 90-year old member when he logs in from assisted living and gets to worship with his church family is heartwarming.

Worshipping community leaders are also doing what they can during this pandemic to help their communities survive. Leaders report more communication and deeper connections as some positive changes they have seen in their worshipping communities during this time of crisis. This includes checking in on one another more frequently, helping in the community, sharing resources, showing unity and supporting one another, and growing or starting an internet presence.

"As we live through the pandemic, the Church will never be the same. Some congregations will close or merge. For others, the pandemic has forced them to rethink how to conduct ministry, sustain and renew fellowship, and share the gospel," said Dr. Susan Barnett, director of Research Services.

One especially positive result is a renewed focus on God. Leaders are noticing an increased "hunger for the Word" and for more spirituality among their worshipers. As one leader said, "Practicing the sacrament of communion around our own tables as we sit to dinner together, but virtually, seems to be a really good way of introducing the sacrament in a way that is different from what we've ever done before, while reminding us that many of the first generations of followers of the Way sat at table with their families, in their homes, taking the sacrament together during dinner."